

CHANGING WORLDS

The strangest things can happen when you are out for a walk. It helps if you are walking in the grandeur of the High Atlas Mountains and the people you are walking with are the British Ambassador to Morocco and a group of girls from Education For All, a set of people and circumstances that took Juliet Kinsman, luxury travel expert and evangelist for womens' education, onto a whole new path in her illustrious career.

"I was chatting with Thomas Reilly, the Ambassador, and said to him that EFA is such an extraordinary and unique initiative someone should make a film about it, so he said, why don't you? As a writer and journalist I think of myself as a professional story-teller, but I also like to celebrate how the travel and hospitality industry can be a force for good."

Juliet discussed the idea with Kuba Nowak, a film-maker she has previously worked with, and they jointly decided that they didn't want to make a promotional

film for a charity, they wanted to make an independent short documentary which was really a story of love and support and how that benefited the girls in terms of getting a secondary education.

"Kuba and I had made small films previously in the UK, but we had never made anything like this. It's a whole different

animal when you open it up do something abroad. I didn't know anything about the Morocracy, (a local blending of the words 'Morocco' and 'bureaucracy' that aptly describes the convolutions of working in the country), which was a whole other process."

Once production began there was a lot of work crammed into a few shooting days.

"It was a real honour and privilege to be allowed to spend time in the girls' dormitories, and we were very sensitive to the fact that these are the girls' homes, and for them to let us be there and to observe life and capture life, they didn't make us feel like we were being intrusive, it was very kind of them to let us be part of their family life, as it were." For the girls of EFA, now numbering almost two hundred in five boarding houses (a sixth will open in September) and fifty attending university, their fellow students, the house mothers and the board-



ing house staff, have become their extended families. But the true test of family life is much closer to home, in the remote villages of the High Atlas Mountains the girls come from, where the support of the families and villagers themselves has gone from fears of the girls becoming drawn into the decadence of 'big city' life when EFA opened its first boarding house in Asni a decade ago, to celebrating the education, the confidence and the chance of a better future than any of the girls could possibly imagined. Many of those early nervous families and villagers have become EFA's greatest advocates.

"Going to the villages and seeing how remote they are was what motivated us to make the film. During the recording we spent time with different girls at different stages. We visited Ghita Ait Moulid, who lives in a remote village, and when her mum spoke to us Kuba and I didn't understand what she was saying, but suddenly there



was a point where everyone in the room started crying and she was obviously revealing something very personal which she'd not told anyone before. Her story was that she was sent away to work when she was seven years old and was subject to terrible abuse from her hosts in Casablanca. We made it very clear that we were making a film and she was sharing this with us, but she clearly felt strongly that she wanted the next generation of girls not to experience what she had experienced. It was because of situations like this that we felt a huge responsibility to tell their story truthfully."

Hearing a story told in a language you don't understand and then re-telling it to get the full, correct meaning has a thousand pitfalls, especially when dealing with a highly emotive subject such as the interwoven lives of a close knit family.

"I've been a journalist for 25 years and language is

everything to me, it's so nuanced. It's absolutely critical that you represent people's sentiments with exactly the right words. We were faced with interviews in French, Arabic, dialectal Arabic and Berber, plus broken English, and it's really, really crucial that the way we represent the people we interviewed through the edit and through the subtitles is true to their words. Without a doubt that's been the biggest challenge practically speaking, and in terms of making sure the right message for the film comes through.

“One of the benefits of having Zahra Ait Boumesaoud with us, who is a former EFA student, is that she speaks their language in a wider sense, she made people feel at ease. Zahra was translating in a basic sense, but we had a professional interpreter go through the transcripts, which was costly, and when we do the final version we will do that again. We kept the costs down with a crew of three; myself, Kuba and our assistant, Memoona Naushahi, but we paid the girls to support us in making the film, which in itself has a positive economic and social impact. That's the model of how we did this.”
“What was really important to me is that this was a very human story, about love, about the house-mothers providing good parenting in the simple sense, but it's really about the opposite of this whole idea that we have the right way of living or

our sophisticated living is superior to this rural way of life. I think it's a reminder that while these girls will definitely benefit from education, we in our world could learn how they live as families; there's love, there's support, they live as a community. For me one of the most poignant things I learned about Islam is that the girls would tell us, “In our culture if you learn something you want to share it, if you have a piece of bread and you are with your family you want to share it.” That's why education there is so powerful and valuable because within the families and the girls is the wish to want to share it, whereas we are much more individualistic in our world. It's something we probably won't get into the film but it's absolutely my favourite story. Ghita was saying that when she went at age eleven to work with a wealthy family, she said, “You know I went there and had seen that life on television and the ultimate goal was to have money and a nice house, and when I got to that family there was medicine everywhere, they had a full fridge but they never had meals together, would all just pass each and never spoke to each other. The environment felt poor.” But you go back to her house and it's mud walls and very basic but there's love there in that room and you realise that's the richness humanity should value.’



Images by Juliet Kinsman

Changing Worlds in the Atlas Mountains will be premiered during Pure Experiences in Marrakech in September



As seen in **Kasbah du Toubkal** magazine

